

# Healthy Weight Loss

Learn the facts about losing weight to improve your health.

## The Weight Challenge

If you are trying to lose weight, you are definitely not alone. Two out of every three American adults are now overweight and about one third of the entire adult population is on a diet at any given time. Losing weight may be one of the most important things you can do to improve your health.

But the quest to lose weight leads many to fad diets and unhealthy weight loss programs. Most "diets" produce short term results and an unhealthy "yo-yo effect" where weight goes up and down. This cycle often ends with unhealthy weight gain instead of weight loss. Losing weight and keeping it off is a big challenge. The following strategies can help you lose weight the healthy way.

## The Path To Healthy Weight Loss

The healthiest way to lose weight is to make real, lasting changes to your lifestyle. The changes you make should become a part of your everyday routine over the long-term. Starting with small changes can make a big difference. For example, by drinking just one less soda or sweetened beverage every day for six months, while keeping everything else the same, the average person would lose more than five pounds. The secret to success is consistency and patience – make changes you can stick with, even if the changes seem small at first.



Aerobic exercise – activity that gets you breathing faster and your heart pumping is important for weight loss. Don't overdo it. You should be able to breathe easily and speak to a friend while exercising. Stretching and strength building exercises can also help you lose weight and get fit. Be sure to choose activities that you enjoy and consult a health professional before beginning any exercise program.

To lose weight you need to burn more calories than you eat or drink. Eating less and eating "better" is important. Try eating a piece of fruit instead of cookies after lunch, or replacing your french fries with a green vegetable. That's not much, but minor everyday changes can make a big difference over time.

## Be More Physically Active:

Becoming a healthier you isn't just about what you eat, it's also about what you do. Regular activity helps control body weight by balancing the calories you eat or drink with the calories you burn everyday.

Experts recommend 60-90 minutes of physical activity daily for people trying to lose weight. That may seem like a lot of exercise if you are just starting out. Begin by trying to be physically active every day. Then gradually increase your amount of activity. The key is making changes you can stick with.

## The Starting Point: Set Realistic Goals

Setting realistic goals is a good way to motivate yourself and monitor your progress. Consider losing 5-10% of your body weight. This is a great place to start. Research shows that even moderate weight loss can deliver significant health benefits.

## Reduce Calories With Portion Control:

Today's portion sizes are often double or triple the recommended amounts. That's why it's so important to know what a single portion really looks like. For example, a serving of steak or chicken breast should be about 4 ounces (easily fitting into the palm of your hand). A serving of nuts should be about 23 almonds.

For more information about serving sizes, visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).

Reading food labels can also help. Avoid extra calories by watching out for packaged foods or beverages that contain two or more servings. Make sure to check the label before you eat or drink the entire package. Estimating portions and reading labels can help you to eat less. Just one or two smaller meals or snacks a day can add up to another five or ten pound weight loss during the year if you stick to it.

## Start a healthy habit

Setting realistic goals, being more physically active and reducing calories are essential strategies for successful weight loss. But there are many other ideas you can use to help you lose weight. The more of these healthy habits that you include in your everyday lifestyle – the more successful you will be in reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.

**Follow the pyramid:** Whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans, low fat dairy and lean protein should be at the core of your daily meals. Total daily calories should be about 2,000 for average sized women and 2,500 for men.

**Start with breakfast:** Studies show that people who are successful at maintaining a healthy weight start the day with a good breakfast. A healthy breakfast gives you an energy boost and helps to control cravings throughout the day.

**Don't skip:** Eating regular meals helps keep you from getting hungry. A missed meal is not a good way to reduce calories. Missing lunch can lead to overeating at dinner or excess snacking in the afternoon.

**Snack smart:** Healthy snacks keep hunger in check and prevent overeating at meal times. Good examples of healthy snacks include nuts, fresh fruit or vegetables, whole grain pretzels or low fat yogurt. But keep snacks under 250 calories.

**Watch your fats:** Ounce for ounce, fat contains more than twice the calories of protein and carbs, so don't eat too many high fat foods. Also, to improve your health replace some of the saturated fat from meats and cheeses with unsaturated fats from fish, nuts and vegetable oils.

**Improve your carbs:** You don't need to eliminate carbs to lose weight, instead choose them wisely. 'Nutrient dense' carbs like whole grains fruits and vegetables are an important part of a balanced diet and help you feel full. 'Empty calorie' carbs like sweetened beverages or candy don't provide nutrients and leave you hungry - so keep the treats to a minimum.

**Don't go it alone:** Working out with a friend or planning healthy meals with your family can help you to stay on track and motivated to achieve your weight loss goal.

**Don't deprive yourself:** Don't banish treats from your day. Include the foods you love in smaller quantities (and a little less frequently) to keep from feeling deprived.

## A healthy lifestyle

To lose weight your main goal should be improved general health – a new way of living, not a short term diet. Making real, lasting lifestyle changes is not easy. When setbacks occur, and they will, try to identify the cause. Be flexible and adjust your everyday routines to get back on track.

Remember that "thin" isn't what's really important. What is important is reaching a healthy weight that enables you to live an energetic, active lifestyle while avoiding the health risks that come with being overweight. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian to help you determine what the right weight is for you.

The key to lasting weight loss is to find healthy habits that you can live with. Over time these new habits will add up to sustainable weight loss and improved health.



Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.



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